



South Central District Health

Keeping your family and community healthy
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SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS)

What is SARS?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is investigating a new disease called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The disease was first reported among people in Guangdong Province (China), Hanoi (Vietnam), and Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China). It has spread to other countries, including Canada and the United States.

What are the symptoms of SARS?

In general, SARS begins with a headache and/or muscle aches, tiredness, and a fever greater than 100.4°F (38.0°C) within 10 days after:

- Returning from travel to an area with documented or suspected community transmission of SARS; or
- After having close contact with a person known to be a suspected SARS case.
- Travel includes transit in an airport in an area with documented or suspected community transmission of SARS.

After the fever begins, a majority of cases develop mild respiratory symptoms such as a dry cough and shortness of breath. In less than 5% of cases, the shortness of breath and difficulty breathing can become severe enough to require medical attention. Difficulty breathing is one of the defining symptoms of SARS that sets it apart from the symptoms of a cold or flu. Current statistics show that over 95% of the people infected with SARS recover from the illness without problems.

How is SARS spread?

Public health experts think that SARS is spread by close contact between people. SARS is most likely spread when someone sick with the disease coughs droplets into the air and someone else breathes them in. It is possible that SARS also can be spread broadly through the air or from touching objects that have become contaminated.

Who is at risk for SARS?

Cases of SARS continue to be reported mainly among people who have had direct, close contact with an infected person, such as those sharing a household with a SARS patient and health care workers who did not use infection control procedures while taking care of a SARS patient. In the United States, there is no indication of community spread at this time. The Centers for Disease Control continue to monitor the situation closely.

What is the possible cause of SARS?

Scientists at the CDC and other laboratories have detected a previously unrecognized corona virus in patients with SARS. This virus type is what typically causes the common cold. It is believed that it will require more than a year to develop a vaccine for SARS.

How do you protect yourself from SARS?

If you have recently traveled in Asia or have been in close contact with someone who might have SARS and you get sick with the symptoms described above, see your healthcare provider. Let your doctor know immediately that you are concerned about SARS.

I am planning a trip to the affected areas of Asia, should I go?

The CDC advises that people planning elective or nonessential travel to Mainland China and Hong Kong, Singapore, and Hanoi may wish to postpone their trips until further notice.

What if I think I may have been exposed to SARS?

People with symptoms of SARS (fever of more than 100.4°F that is accompanied by a dry cough and/or difficulty breathing) should consult a healthcare provider. Let them know immediately you are concerned about SARS. To help the healthcare provider make a diagnosis, tell him or her about any recent travel you may have made to places where SARS has been reported or whether there was contact with someone who had these symptoms.

**For more information about SARS, contact
South Central District Health at 734-5900 ext. 239, or visit the
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov.**